Briefly about contact with press and media

Background

Journalists (and the general public) are interested in the research carried out within Lund University Faculty of Medicine. At the Faculty we produce and distribute over 60 press releases every year. A majority of these describe our research. Our press work also gets a substantial amount of coverage in the press and other media.

The way we present our research therefore has a significant impact on how journalists, the wider public and other stakeholders perceive us and the work we do.

Most of our press releases are also translated into English. For distribution we use EurekAlert Alpha Galileo and IDW - channels that, among other things, distributes scientific press releases to the media globally.

In addition we receive a large number of requests from journalists (either directly to the researcher or via the Faculty Communications Department) for researchers who can participate / speak as an expert in a particular field. We also arrange journalist seminars as well as press conferences if necessary.

Finally, the confidence in researchers and how research can contribute to society is high in Sweden. It’s positive!

What should you be aware of when dealing with the media?

The question of responsibility: what is our responsibility, and what is the media’s responsibility?

We can’t take responsibility for how the media chooses to report on our activities, but we are responsible for the information we provide and how it is designed. In this, it’s important to be:

- true and correct
  - content must obviously be scientifically accurate and not promise something for which there is no scientific evidence
  - in the reporting of, for example, new possible treatments and diagnoses, it’s important to be clear about the fact that the path to a final result may be long and problematic
  - in cases where researchers have different opinions and there is an ongoing public debate – clearly state that there are other opinions

- accessible and open
  - inquiries from the press and media must always be answered. “I don’t know” and “I will get back to you on that” are also valid answers
  - the researcher must be available for comment/interview the same day a press release is sent out

- credible and understandable
  - interesting, but not “selling”
  - avoid writing in a way that might be perceived as alarming and be aware that what we say can ultimately affect patients, their relatives and the health care system in general
  - be clear about the difference between cause and causal interaction and to distinguish between findings and interpretations
PROCEDURES FOR / CONTACT WITH JOURNALISTS

When a journalist call:

- **Take note of:**
  - the journalist’s name - write it down
  - if the journalist seeks your expert opinion (usually when it comes to research) it is quite in order to ask about the context in which the article / feature is to be published
  - find out what questions the journalist wants answered and when the deadline is
  - tell the journalist that you will call back in 30 minutes

- **Reflection and return the call**
  - What’s it regarding? Does the journalist want a comment or an interview relating to one of your press releases, or does the request relate to something else entirely? Take a look at the questions and consider if you are the right person to answer or if you should recommend a colleague
  - prepare - what is important, what are the facts, and what is the background
  - express yourself easily and clearly as possible. Avoid technical terms if possible, and if you must use them remember to explain their meaning
  - sometimes it is helpful and useful to discuss the matter with a colleague
  - if insecure and doubtful – get help from a member of Communications team
  - journalists normally work to a tight schedule – call back on time

- **Once you have been interviewed**
  The article belongs to the journalist and you do not necessarily have the right to read the article prior to publication. Most of the time it’s not a problem, but offer the journalist:
  - to read your quotes so that nothing is vague or factually incorrect. Make an agreement on this in advance
  - if possible, provide the journalist with supplementary written information. This may include factual information or a short and easy description on the subject you discussed
  - it reduce the risk of misunderstanding.

**Remember**
Contact with journalists can be positive, rewarding and fun!
Don’t feel stressed by the situation or the reporter.

You are always welcome to contact the Faculty Communications Department if you have any questions, or feel insecure regarding to media related issues.

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